



**COMMUNITY
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FOR
LEARNING**

WriterCoach Connection™

**Program Assessment
2010-11**

Executive Summary

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For the design of the program assessment and for the preparation of the WCC Assessment Report, we most gratefully acknowledge the expertise of Phyllis J. Hallam, Ph.D. (See Appendix 4 of the full report for credentials.)

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Student Survey Results.....	1
Teacher Survey Results	3
Test-Based Data	4
Descriptive Data.....	4
Action Steps.....	5

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Introduction

The one-on-one interaction with another adult has implications beyond just the writing. I have watched students engage with their coach, some of whom have been with the program with them since middle school. This consistency in their lives is a significant factor in helping the student's confidence. Working one on one with their writing, students complete assignments, understand the editing process, and learn new ways of looking at their writing. --- *Laurie Rodney, English teacher, Community Partnerships Academy/Berkeley High School*

The comments of Ms. Rodney embody the strength and purpose of WriterCoach Connection™ (WCC), a community volunteer-based program that provides one-on-one writing conferences for 7th- through 11th-grade students as they complete English class assignments. WCC recruits, trains, and coordinates volunteer coaches to support the learning and teaching of writing with these individual in-class writing conferences.

The annual WriterCoach Connection Program Assessment is a benchmark for measuring program progress in supporting English teachers and their students. Students and teachers respond to surveys designed to provide feedback on key aspects of the coaching process. In addition, CAFL analyzes student writing-achievement assessment essays. A coach survey compliments this process in evaluating coach experiences, training, and concerns. Assessment guides program improvement and planning, and program accountability to supporters, schools, and community members.

The 2010-11 report delineates remarkable results and an exceptional level of engagement by students, teachers, and community volunteers.

Student Survey Results

In spring 2011, students¹ from nine California secondary schools (in Albany, Berkeley, El Cerrito and Oakland) completed a survey that asked them to rate their experience with eleven aspects of the coaching process on a four-point scale. The scale ranged from “not helpful” to “very helpful.”

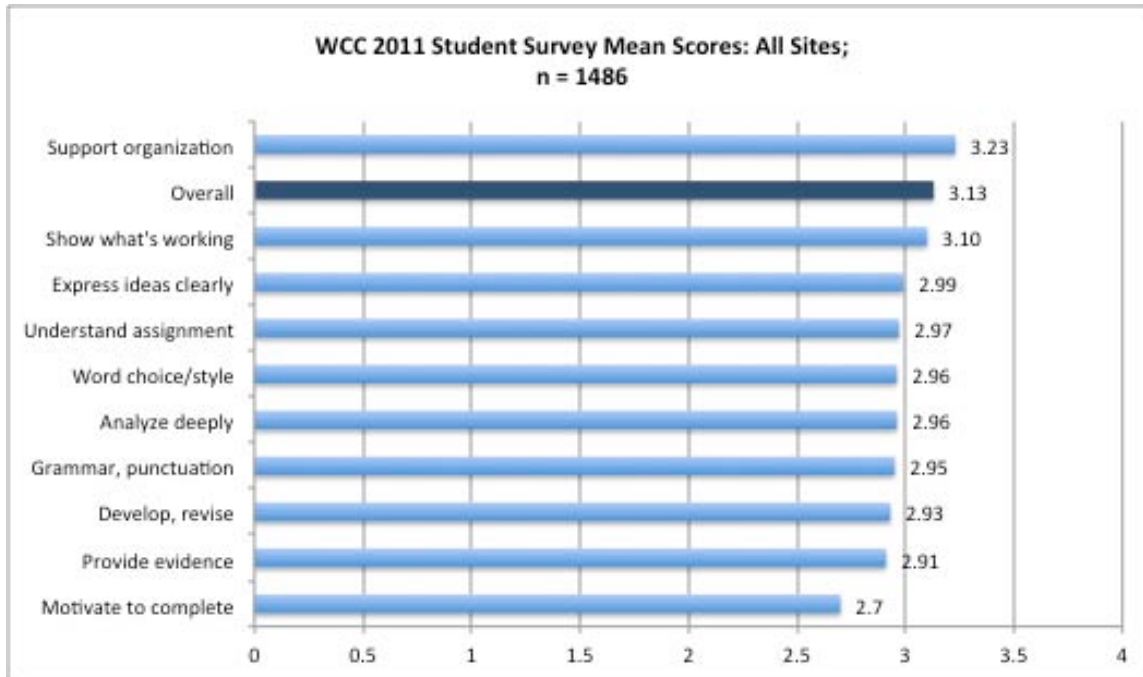
Due to school-district budget cutbacks at Albany Middle School, CAFL conducted a modified, two-month writer coaching program rather than the typical full-year program.

¹ Approximately 97% of participating students completed surveys, with comments and qualitative responses reviewed. Actions were taken to address any specific concerns. For the purpose of the quantitative analysis, all student responses were tallied and are reflected in the charts and statistics cited in this report.

These students completed a slightly different survey to reflect their coaching experience; those survey responses are presented and evaluated in Section 11 of the full report and are included in the overall survey responses presented in this section.

Major results of the full-year program student survey are as follows:

Figure 1.1. Student Survey Mean Scores



1. **Overall, students rated writer coaching as “helpful”** (Mean = 3.23). The highest scores came from El Cerrito High School, mean 3.19; Media Academy, mean 3.14; and Mandela High School, mean 3.13.
2. The mean score for overall helpfulness of coaching was 3.13. Students felt the most helpful aspects of coaching were “Giving me suggestions for organizing my ideas,” “Showing me what’s working in my writing,” and “Showing me how to express my ideas more clearly,” which all round to a mean score of 3.0 or higher, followed closely by “Checking that I understand the assignment completely” (2.97). Most other elements were in the 2.9 range.
3. The notably high ratings of 3.0 or above reflect both the energetic interaction between student and coach and the program’s intent in developing writing and critical thinking skills, and in addressing issues for which teachers most consistently request help for their students. Student comments further underscore the degree to which coaches help students clarify their ideas, organize their thoughts, and develop clear, fluid writing. Sample student comments are presented in Section 13 of this report.

The prompt “Motivating me to complete and turn in my assignments” generated a mean score of 2.7, slightly lower than the overall 2.9 for other prompts. Responses to this prompt may be due in part to students who feel that they do not need any help with motivation and therefore mistakenly score the prompt 1 or 2, instead of “not applicable.”

Overall, student survey results were consistent with findings from previous years.

Teacher Survey Results

All participating teachers completed the program assessment survey. Teachers answered questions regarding program impact, help with particular elements of writing and writing tasks, and program logistics. The teacher survey also included evaluation of the helpfulness of coaching for students with differing skill levels. Major results of the teacher survey are as follows:

1. **Teachers rated all elements of the program as helpful or very helpful, with a range of 3.15, “helpful” to 3.80, “very helpful.”**
2. **All teachers said their writer coaches were helpful with improving the quality of student writing**, with a mean overall score of 3.68 (rounding to “very helpful”).
3. Twelve of the 16 specific elements regarding student engagement, improvement, and writing skills earned mean scores of 3.5 or above, “very helpful,” with the remaining four elements earning mean scores of 3.2 (“helpful”) or above.
4. Significantly, when asked to compare a recent writing assignment on which students *did not* have writer coaching with a similar recent assignment on which students *did* have writer coaching, teachers indicated they observed “very much” improvement, with a mean score of 3.5 or above for all elements: rate of assignments turned in, overall quality of student writing, grades earned, and individual student improvement. These results indicate that teachers observe a significant impact on student performance when students work with the writer coaches.
5. As in the past, teachers rated work with site coordinators very highly, with a mean score of 3.6 for “working with site coordinators to convey your goals for each assignment.” These responses indicate the high degree to which WriterCoach Connection is embedded within the curriculum of the schools, and is recognized by teachers as supporting their learning goals for their students.

Teacher comments in the surveys indicate a high level of appreciation for the support of writer coaches, and of the importance of individual attention from a trusted adult. A sampling of teacher comments is included in Section 12 of this report. One representative of the typical overall teacher sentiment comes from an El Cerrito High School teacher:

Rarely as a teacher am I available for my students to give them the time and attention they sorely need. The WCC was an experience that has changed the lives of many. A number of ELD 4 students transitioned out to mainstream courses and were redesignated proficient in English, and it is no question that WCC played a big role in this regard.

Test-Based Data

In Oakland, Media Academy students coached by WCC volunteers again made an extraordinarily strong showing on the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). A robust 70% of the students passed the English Language Arts section of the exam on the first attempt, and 34% of the students scored 380 (the threshold for proficiency) or above on the essay portion of the exam. These results continue a record of strong writing achievement on this exam among 10th graders since they began working with WCC volunteers on CAHSEE test preparation three years ago.

Descriptive Data

Table 1.1. WCC Program Statistics, 2010-11

	BHS-CPA	BHS-CAS	KMS	LMS	WMS	AMS	Media	Mandela	ECHS
<i>Teachers</i>	2	2	5	6	3	4	1	2	4
<i>Classes</i>	4	2	11	11	6	10	3	5	6
<i>Students</i>	121	60	300	258	155	301	67	127	140
<i>Sessions</i>	594	279	2,626	2,371	1,700	1,128	625	863	1,226
<i>Sessions per Class/Student</i>	7-8	7-8	9-10	9-10	12-13	4	12	11	9-10
<i>Coaches*</i>	48	45	65	62	60	51	36	47	49

**# Coaches active in spring*

SUBTOTALS BY DISTRICT:

	BUSD	OUSD	ALBANY	WCCUSD	GRAND TOTAL
<i>Teachers</i>	18	3	4	4	29
<i>Classes</i>	34	8	10	6	58
<i>Students</i>	894	194	301	140	1,529
<i>Sessions</i>	7,570	1,488	1,128	1,226	11,412
<i>Coaches</i>	280	83	51	49	463

Action Steps

WCC assessment is a powerful tool for analyzing the overall effectiveness of the program, for spotlighting any issues needing attention, and for providing timely response to those issues.

Community Alliance for Learning continues program development activities to address the data and narrative comments generated through the teacher, student, and coach surveys. Survey responses are evaluated on multiple levels, as follows:

1. Review by site coordinators and CAFL staff of every survey response, flagging those which require prompt attention. A teacher concern about a session that didn't go as expected, a student requesting a more compatible coach, a student submitting negative survey responses – anything out of the ordinary receives immediate attention and followup. Most often this followup involves the site coordinator and/or CAFL staff conferring with a teacher to understand possible causes and to work together to resolve issues. Some mitigation measures include redoubling efforts to communicate with teachers and coaches about goals of the lesson, providing timely updates when circumstances change, and responding to identification of specific learning issues and strategies that may be effective with a particular student.
2. Review and compilation of narrative comments, and development of an action plan to address weaknesses, build on strengths, respond to requests, etc. Major elements of that plan in response to this year's survey results are discussed below.
3. Analysis of data presented in Sections 1-14 of this report. This analysis measures whether the program is meeting its goals in supporting its primary constituents, the students and participating teachers, in the process of learning and teaching writing.

The effectiveness of writer coaching directly depends on the coach understanding the assignment and understanding the individual student with whom he or she is working. Clear goals from teachers and specific, action-oriented steps from coaches yield the best results. As demonstrated in the survey results, the WriterCoach Connection program Best Practices provide the optimal outcomes. Those Best Practices, which CAFL will continue to emphasize and refine, include:

1. Teachers providing information before the first coaching session of the year, and throughout the year as warranted, regarding specific student learning needs, writing levels, and English-language learning needs.
2. Site coordinators using teacher-supplied information to prepare coaches in advance, to provide coaches with information regarding particular student needs, and to encourage coaches to address the learning goals of the assignments. Continued focus on this area has resulted in higher degrees of student, teacher, and coach satisfaction. We will continue to build on these efforts in establishing Best Practices protocols for site coordinators.

3. Coaches providing students with specific action-oriented steps that address the expressed goals of the coaching session. The goal is for each coaching session to provide students with two or three specific suggestions about how to proceed with the writing assignment. We will continue to emphasize this coaching step in volunteer training sessions and refresher workshops.

The site coordinator is pivotal to these key elements of program success and thus many of the action steps involve the role of the site coordinator. Support for site coordinators in their crucial role as the link among teachers, students, and coaches is an essential area for ongoing WCC program development.

Coach training is another key element in the effectiveness of WriterCoach Connection and is frequently cited in surveys as an important component of volunteer satisfaction. Based on stakeholder survey results and input from site coordinators and trainers, future training sessions will:

- Place additional emphasis on awareness that much of our work with students involves the early stages of the writing process; e.g., brainstorming to create theses and topic sentences for essays.
- Continue to address the challenge of simultaneously, in a session of 20 to 30 minutes, listening to a student, working with the student to develop strategies to improve a written assignment, and noting the highlights of the coaching session on the coach worksheet with sufficient clarity that the student (and the teacher) will be able to subsequently read it and recall what the student and the coach discussed.
- Emphasize specific aspects of working with English learners.
- Recognize the significant differences in cultural backgrounds among students and in learning capacities on the continuum of 7th- to 11th-grade levels.
- Focus on awareness that the ownership of a student's written assignment rests with the student and that the student's input in the coach-student exchange is paramount.
- Continue to refine procedures regarding the effective use of coaching worksheets.
- Reiterate and emphasize certain aspects of the existing training that can positively impact the effectiveness of coaching, such as helping to ensure that students turn in their work after a coaching session.

Additional action steps in response to this year's survey data and comments include:

1. Continued emphasis in teacher-orientation workshops on the need for teachers to minimize departures from the schedule of written assignments throughout the school

year, and to provide assignment information to site coordinators, for transmission to coach volunteers, as far in advance as possible.

2. Continued development of additional training materials regarding working with English learners and struggling students, as teachers and schools work to get these students proficient in language arts.
3. Working to ensure that students who are English learners clearly understand the WCC assessment survey questions.
4. Continued development of training for coaches and site coordinators to ensure effective use of information regarding specific student learning needs and writing levels. By working to understand in advance the particular needs or writing levels of students, coaches will be able to more quickly adapt their approach to the appropriate level to best serve the needs of the student, whether that student is a highly proficient writer, an emerging writer, an English learner, a student with a learning disability that requires a slightly slower speaking style, etc.
5. Encouraging new volunteers to visit a site and observe coaching in progress before they complete training. This procedure is not always possible in the fall, because some training sessions take place before coaching has commenced.
6. Further encouragement of coaches to use the WCC *Shortcuts to Effective Writing* handout resource in their writing conferences with students.
7. Continued evaluation of best practices for discreetly documenting teacher information about individual student needs, and for discreetly documenting coaching interactions with individual students to carry forward coach observations and notes. Site coordinators have discussed potential benefits and alternative systems for logging student information. We will consider options for best practices about discreet documentation of useful information to promote effective coaching sessions.
8. Particularly as WriterCoach Connection expands to new school sites, continued communication with teachers, school administrators, and district officials about viewing our work within the larger context of language-arts goals toward which teachers are working.

The full version of this report describes survey results for teachers and students overall, results for individual school sites, and test-based data. Technical statistical information is incorporated in the appendices. The full report is modular, so that sections can be distributed individually to specific schools and school districts.

The full report is available in .pdf format on request and at the website of Community Alliance for Learning, <http://www.writercoachconnection.org/results.html>.